

TOBACCO INSTITUTE

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-----nth in a series from The Tobacco Institute
in response to mounting requests for the
little-known 'other side' of the smoking
controversy

How the most frightening statistic
about smoking
came to be invented

What?
You may recall reading it. Or hearing it.

The frightening claim that "300,000 excess deaths a year" are caused by cigarettes has echoed from thousands of editorials, stories and speeches.

A factual figure? No. It is actually quite speculative. Yet it has been cited again and again -- as fact -- by commentators, most of whom have been themselves misled.

Where the figure comes from is worth retracing. It is an interesting case history of importance to all concerned over the present status of the smoking controversy.

SUBHEAD:

The Story Behind The Statistic

Advisory Committee
The Surgeon General's 1964 report, "Smoking and Health," prepared by an Advisory Committee, refused to offer any such figure. The report specifically said that the number of deaths that might be attributed to cigarettes could not be "accurately estimated." *did not*

The Assistant Surgeon General, who was also Committee Vice Chairman, told the press at the time:

"The Committee considered the possibility of trying to make such calculations, but it involves so many assumptions that the Committee felt it should not attempt this, that it might be as misleading as it was informing."

Emerson Foote

Yet, on the first anniversary of the report, on January 11,

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1965, Emerson Foote attacked cigarettes for causing 125,000 to 300,000 deaths a year.

Foote was at the time chairman of the National Interagency Council on Smoking and Health, a quasi-official anti-cigarette group that operates out of Public Health Service offices in Arlington, Virginia.

Daniel Horn

Soon, Daniel Horn, psychologist-director of the National Clearinghouse for Smoking and Health -- an agency of the Public Health Service -- was saying that smoking was responsible for at least 125,000 premature deaths a year.

His source, he said, was Emerson Foote.

Back To Foote

In hearings before the U.S. Congress, Foote was asked where he got his figures. His reply: The Public Health Service, Horn's employer.

In the public press, this game of statistical ping-pong -- which was utterly without scientific support -- was never exposed.

Horn Re-Queried

At the same Congressional hearing, the ball was tossed back into the hands of Daniel Horn. He was asked for an explanation. Horn counted up 138,000 deaths -- 33,500 from lung cancer, 80,000 from coronary disease, 16,500 from bronchitis and emphysema, and 8,000 from cancer of the oral cavity, esophagus, larynx and bladder.

It appeared that Horn had arbitrarily included diseases that were not claimed in the 1964 Surgeon General's report to be causally related to smoking.

Luther Terry ~~Tries~~ *depends*

Before long, former Surgeon General Luther Terry undertook to explain the full 300,000 figure. He did this by:

- a. Using Horn's unsupported explanation of 138,000 deaths.
- b. Adding in another 102,000 deaths -- "from diseases where the relationship to cigarette smoking, while not obvious, is clearly indicated."
- c. Tacking on a "reasonable estimate" of 60,000 excess deaths for women.

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Improvisation Becomes "Fact"

Although this 300,000 figure is an arbitrary estimate -- based on speculation and without scientific or clinical verification -- it has become a dramatic part of the case against cigarettes.

It is a figure that is easy to remember, and easy to quote. And it has received enormous publicity: printed, reprinted, quoted, requoted, given a currency out of all proportion to what may or may not be true.

It continues to be repeated -- as gospel -- by many individuals who are clearly unaware of how the figure came to be created.

SUBHEAD:

Research
The Importance of the Truth
continued research

Only truth can bring the perplexing and intricate controversy over smoking to an end. And much is now being done to advance our knowledge of the ailments in question and to determine whether smoking does indeed play a role.

acceptably sufficient
But little is known for sure. To date, for instance, there is not scientific, medical or clinical validation for the current charges against cigarettes. Nor is there, on the other hand, evidence that exonerates smoking. The work of research goes on -- conducted by the tobacco industry and by many other responsibly involved agencies.

sufficient to prove
of causation
In the meantime, statistical claims that do not reflect the truth are useless. They can be worse than useless: they can mislead and confirm prejudice, and close the mind, and even deter further needed research.

And neither side of the controversy can afford them.

Insert box

For further information on any of the facts above, for all documentation and sources of information, you are invited to write to:

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For a fuller discussion, read "THE CIGARETTE CONTROVERSY." Write to The Tobacco Institute for your free copy.

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